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August 6, 2020

The Honorable Russell T. Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Vought,

I write to express my support for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) request to reprogram funding for sediment monitoring and predesign work for the raising of the sediment retention structure (SRS) on the Lower Cowlitz River in Cowlitz County, Washington state.

As I have highlighted in past letters to you on this subject, funding was authorized by Congress in 1985 for sediment control in the Mount St. Helens Construction Account. Congress also authorized USACE to construct, operate, and maintain the SRS to reduce the risk of flood for communities like Longview, Kelso, Castle Rock, and Lexington. Proper flood control requires yearly monitoring to ensure that river levels do not reach a point that could threaten communities with a significant flood event or risk the viability of the SRS that protects these communities. Unfortunately, federal agencies have not reliably provided funding for this vital work, creating uncertainty and an undue financial burden for local communities most at risk from the impacts of flooding.

Last year, the local county government and several community partners were forced to commit \$120,000 to partially complete some of the sediment monitoring work after the federal government failed to provide the funding. The results of their study found that flood protection levels are below federally authorized levels near some of the communities at risk. Additionally, USACE anticipates needing to raise the sediment retention structure another ten feet in the coming years to further protect cities and towns from potentially devastating floods.

Without federal funding this year for the necessary sediment monitoring and predesign work for the raising of the SRS, these local communities will again be forced to put up local dollars to cover for what is supposedly a federal commitment. In any typical year, finding funding for these activities is difficult at best, and the COVID-19 related effects on county and local government revenues this year will make it nearly impossible. Counties and towns should not be forced to divert funds from other vital community services to make up for the lack of consistent federal support for sediment monitoring and SRS improvements.

Failing to address the risk to impacted communities not only threatens them with the uncertainty of flooding but fails to give them the peace of mind that the monitoring can provide. I ask that you approve the USACE reprogramming request to ensure these communities can be properly protected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jaime Herrera Beutler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress